

THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION,
RECOMMENDED
IN A
Letter to his Pupils.

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"THE GOOD ALONE CAN HAPPINESS ENJOY."

MONTREAL :
PRINTED BY NAHUM MOWER.
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1807.

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DEDICATION.

To Mr. Andrew Stuart, and Mr.
James Cartwright, Students at Law,
the following Letter is inscribed as a
mark of esteem,

By their sincere Friend,

JOHN STRACHAN.

ADVERTISEMENT.

This Letter with a few verbat alterations forms the last of a course of Lectures, which the Author has drawn up for the use of his Scholars—Should this specimen be favorably received, he may be induced at some future period to publish the whole. In perusing this little work the critical reader will recollect, that it is a kind of recapitulation, and therefore allows more abrupt transitions and a greater rapidity of style than usual.—The sentiments must speak for themselves.

MR. STRACHAN'S
LETTER TO HIS PUPILS.

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MY DEAR FRIENDS,

YOUR love of virtue, and of truth, the education you have already received, and your excellent natural dispositions are so many pledges to me that you will always in your practice and opinions remain the steady friends of sound morals, and of true religion. The enemies of the Gospel by applying to the vanity of men, and rendering irreligion fashionable have lately gained thousands of profelytes, who with all the zeal of new converts are perpetually obtruding upon you, their blasphemy, and their doubts. They are eager to tell you there is no God, no future retribution or moral distinction, and puffed up with a few slender arguments got by rote they suppose themselves qualified to decide on all those important points which ennoble religion, and constitute her essence.

With shallow men the fashion is every thing, whether in their mode of dress or of thinking. On this principle we account for those furious enthusiasts of the present day for undefined liberty and unrestrained licentiousness : a few centuries ago they would have been the murderers of the Albigenes, and the promoters of the crusades. It

was reserved for them to exhibit in this enlightened age the astonishing Phenomenon of men preaching humanity, liberality, and toleration, while they are persecuting with violence, not for believing too much, but because some men still presume to believe in demonstration, and for fear of retaining any portion of Christianity, these enthusiasts have not only rejected its doctrines, but the moderation, the charity, the piety it enjoins.

Let me warn you not to be surprised though you meet with many in society who despise and ridicule Christianity, the purest, and most sublime of all religions. Persons of vicious and corrupt habits feel little anxiety to examine its evidence. They are not much disposed to listen to doctrines which restrain their wicked propensities, and make them dissatisfied with themselves. Such people are not all equally wicked, but they are all dangerous companions, and should always be avoided as the determined enemies of your most precious interests. You will find them in general incapable of raising their thoughts to the contemplation of the Author of nature. Their minds are so debased, and their faculties so obtuse that they feel not the force of arguments in favor of religious truth, nor can they perceive the beauty and the excellence of the morality which the Gospel inculcates. Yet they will dare to sneer and laugh at serious things, and utter terrible blasphemies without understanding them.

If you meet with a few unbelievers of greater abilities, and more improved intellects, you will find them prostituting their talents in the cause of vice, and industriously collecting jests and sophisms against religion which they are careful to repeat in the ears of the young and inexperienced, to draw them from the truth. They know that with young and uncultivated minds, ridicule has frequently more weight than the strongest arguments. Besides to argue correctly is beyond their strength, and against their inclinations.

But though you meet with some of these profane jesters well supplied with puzzling questions which they propose with an imposing air of liberality, and affect much candour and sincerity, be not deceived by their false pretences, and never let the supposition enter your mind, that religion is not true because you are unable to answer their questions. For it does not follow that the proofs of religion are weak, or that their objections are strong, because you may not be able to refute them. You never conclude when you cannot answer a difficult question in Arithmetic, that nobody can answer it, on the contrary you justly suppose that to others more advanced it is easy of solution. In the same way when one of these difficulties concerning religion is proposed, you should reflect that though you may be unable to solve it, people who have been at more pains easily may, or that it is captious and of no import-

ance. But that you may be more able to detect them, observe how these sceptics proceed.

It generally happens that their first step to sap the foundation of religion in the minds of the young, is to calumniate it's teachers and adherents as a set of dangerous men, directed by deceit or blinded with superstition, to whom no principles belong but intolerance, bigotry, and narrowness of mind. These bold assertions, and specious invectives, although at first despised, begin at last to be credited. We hear the calumny so often united with it's object, that the mention of the one almost mechanically introduces the other, and we are betrayed into dangerous prejudices, rather by a principle of association, than a decision of the judgment. If you love candour, freedom of discussion, truth and universal benevolence ; if you desire an exemption from prejudice and advancement in real mental improvement ; join yourselves to us, say modern sceptics, for we only possess them. The unsuspecting youth look up to them with admiration, and implicitly believe their assertions, for not able steadily to examine the justice of their professions or their imputations against religion, they are fascinated with the appearance of generosity and hating the artifice and baseness, with which their new friends tell them religion is defended, they become ashamed of believing it, and long to be numbered among those conspicuous for liberality of sentiment and freedom of research.

Think not however, that, in pleading the cause of religion, I defend the conduct of all its professors. They have been guilty of much wickedness, and with many of them bigotry and superstition have still an asylum; but I contend that these have nothing to do with religion herself. Let any one prove that the doctrines of the Gospel necessarily tend to narrowness of mind, persecuting zeal, or gloomy superstition, and I shall be among the first to desert her cause.

All the gifts of heaven are liable to corruption. With greater propriety might we despise reason, because it frequently directs us wrong; or reject many of the greatest comforts of life because under certain aspects they appear evil. Why should we be always told of the oppressions of churchmen during the middle ages? It can have no weight at present, since no person can deny that they are now for the most part above artifice, and strangers to bigotry, conspicuous for their liberality, their moderation, their love of truth, and their charity. Surely, against such men the evidence of people ought not to be received without much allowance, who with moderation on their lips, persecute with unrelenting cruelty, are bigoted amidst their liberality, and furious amidst their toleration, and while they are so anxious to pull down Christianity, know of nothing to substitute in its room. The fine spun theories of the Metaphysician are

forgotten by himself in active life, and over mankind they can never acquire any influence.

I mentioned some time ago my intention of transmitting you my sentiments on religion ; it is now proper that a subject of such inestimable importance should occupy some of your thoughts. For you to examine the evidences of Christianity, is at present impossible, on account of your youth and other avocations, take then the result of my inquiry, sometimes nearly in the words of my author, till your understanding ripen and a time of leisure arrive. I shall not hinder you from stating and refuting objections ; but observe here in general, that I will not make a single assertion, which I am not ready if required, to prove to your satisfaction.

There is, however, one objection that I wish to notice, which, as it meets us in the very threshold of our inquiry, seems to demand some examination. It has much influence with many, and prevents them from ever examining this interesting subject—Religion is said to exclude her friends from all the enjoyments of life. Never was there a greater calumny than this. Who have so great reason to be pleased and cheerful as those who are conscious of doing their duty, and are enlightened by religious truths ? Is any one ignorant that the most exquisite pleasures flow from the exercise of the virtues, pleasures infinitely superior to any that the wicked ever enjoy.

No my friends, religion will debar you from no innocent gratifications, she condemns not all kinds of pleasures, she only distinguishes the lawful from the spurious. She points out which may be enjoyed without danger and the pernicious effects which attend the rest, "I am anxious for your happiness, she says to her friends, and earnestly desire to guard you from deception—pleasures at first always produce agreeable sensations, but they are not always lawful. They are not always consistent with the dignity of human nature, or the purity of the heart, many are destructive both to body and mind, and even the innocent, by too frequent indulgence, change into pain, or occupy that time which might have been more usefully employed. I debar you from no pleasures that really contribute to your felicity. If I warn you against those of a sensual kind, it is because they are commonly pernicious, and are forever promising more than they can perform. And if I tell you to use innocent pleasures with moderation, it is because their excess produces disgust. Instead of contracting, I will enlarge and elevate the circle of your pleasures, and present sources of enjoyment infinitely superiour to those of sense. I begin with correcting all the disorders which the passions and appetites may have engendered, and placing your heavenly Father before you, as the continual object of your imitation. Descend not to the imitation of men whose example may controul

your exertions, and reconcile you to sloth. Never think that you have reached the pinnacle of wisdom, of virtue or of piety. Set not limits to the good you perform, nor consider any degree of moral or intellectual improvement beyond your reach. Look upon what you have acquired as only the beginning, the seed which should spring up, and enable you to reach to much greater degrees of perfection."

Such is the language of religion—She bids us be perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect. She improves all our faculties, and elevates the soul to the contemplation of the most glorious truths. She combines in the characters of her friends every thing that is amiable, dignified and glorious. Such we shall discover that religion to be which we hear so frequently condemned by pretenders to knowledge who are loud and vehement in proportion as they are ignorant—Indeed, the calumny that religion debars us from all the enjoyments of life may be taken as a fair specimen of the implacable spirits by which unbelievers are actuated against her, and although their sophistry and deceit, as in this instance, may be easily detected, it will be your best method never to enter into disputes with them, which seldom produce good. On the contrary you will find it more useful when you meet with such persons to recall to your minds a few of those eminent men who have given the strongest proofs of their belief in divine revelation, at the same time that they

were the admiration of the world for their virtue, their abilities, and their learning. Out of thousands which have equal claims to notice, for since the promulgation of the gospel, the most famous men in every department of art and science have been its adherents, I shall select a very few. Not that I consider the approbation of the most distinguished men a sufficient proof of religion ; it is only a presumptive argument. Its truth rests on principles independent of this assent, it is however gratifying to know that the most eminent in all ages have been firm believers.

Lord Chatham, that great orator, statesman, and patriot, whose vigorous and commanding eloquence enforced those counsels to which Great Britain owed her preeminence, and glory, gives this memorable advice to his nephew, Lord Camelford, then a student at Cambridge.

“I come now to the part of the advice I have to offer to you, which most nearly concerns your welfare, and upon which every good and honorable purpose of your life will assuredly turn ; I mean the keeping up in your heart the true sentiments of religion. If you are not right towards God, you can never be so towards man ; the noblest sentiment of the human breast is here brought to the test. Is gratitude in the number of a man’s virtues ? If it be, the highest benefactor demands the warmest returns of gratitude, love, and praise : Ingratum qui dixerit omnia dixit. If a man

wants this virtue, where there are infinite obligations to excite and quicken it, he will be likely to want all others towards his fellow creatures, whose utmost gifts are poor compared to those he daily receives at the hands of his never failing Almighty friend. Remember thy creator in the days of thy youth, is big with the deepest wisdom : The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom ; and, an upright heart, that is understanding. This is eternally true, whether the wits and rakes of Cambridge allow it or not : nay, I must add of this religious wisdom, ‘ Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace,’ whatever your young gentlemen of pleasure think. Hold fast, therefore, by this sheet anchor of happiness, Religion, you will often want it in the times of most danger ; the storms and tempests of life. Cherish true religion as preciously as you will fly with abhorrence and contempt superstition and enthusiasm. The first is the perfection and glory of the human nature ; the two last the depravation and disgrace of it. Remember, the essence of religion is a heart void of offence towards God, and man ; not subtle speculative opinions, but an active, vital principle of faith.”

Lord Bacon whose mind embraced the whole circle of the sciences, the greatest of men, and the glory of his country was a sincere Christian—Sir Isaac Newton who penetrated the mysteries of nature, was as eminent for his piety, as for his unri-

valled talents. The profound Locke, Milton the first of English Poets, Addison the enlightened and amiable writer of the Spectator, Sir William Jones, the friend of humanity, and the most illustrious of Scholars, were Christians. I might select myriads of distinguished Persons in every age and country, where Christianity was known, and in every department of knowledge, not only divines, but also Philosophers, Poets, Moralists and Physicians, Statesmen and Lawyers, men whose great talents and extensive information made them the ornaments of human nature. Not satisfied with giving a bare assent, they gloried in their religion. They recommended it to others as most worthy their regard, the best foundation of happiness in this life, and their consolation in death.

As then you are anxious to realize the fond hopes of your parents, to become the support, and glory of their age, to repay them for the many hours of uneasiness which you have cost them ; As you are solicitous to become respectable members of society, to taste the purest of all pleasures, to rise superior to the storms and misfortunes of this life, to become the favorites of God, and the heirs of immortality, I conjure you to attend to this short view of religion, that you may become her determined friends, and that these happy prospects may never be disappointed.

To ask if you believe in God, would be to insult your understanding ; Gratitude clings to the

glorious truth, and reason sanctions the embrace. The Sun, the Moon, and the Stars, the inhabitants of the land and water so wonderfully suited to their different situations, and habits of life, loudly proclaim a first cause of infinite power and wisdom. Above all, the admirable form of our bodies, and the astonishing powers of our minds. Is it credible that this intelligence that dwells within us, which combines, which calculates which mounting above the earth rises to heaven, or descends to hell ; which brings the past into review before us, penetrates into the future, and forms conceptions of immortality, can have sprung from chance ? And is it credible that it shines only for a moment and like a feeble taper is extinguished forever ? The consent of all nature proves the being of a God, and in the belief of his existence, that of religion is included, for as our benefactor we owe him thanks, but to offer up thanksgiving to God is the first act of piety.

Religion descended from heaven at the creation, and the breast of Adam was her first temple. Eve too enjoyed her inestimable blessings. Their notes of praise ascended together to the author of their being ; the feathered tribes united their warblings, Eden smiled with the bloom of innocence, and Angels hailed the glorious concert. After this happy state of things was destroyed, and sin had deformed the Creation, a series of holy men served as guides to one another, in observing the

law of nature, which was the only religion at that time pleasing in the sight of God.* Among the posterity of Abraham, one of these holy men, the truths of natural religion remain improved, and uncorrupted to this very day—But this people assert that many truths have been revealed to them by God himself, besides what were handed down by their father Abraham, and the proofs they produce are certainly convincing. Nor can it be incredible that God should graciously reveal those things to man, which are essential to his happiness, and which he could never discover, after blessing him with existence, and giving him the Earth for his habitation.

Our youthful fancies, delighted with the splendor of Greece and Rome, treat the Jews disrespectfully, and forget that this injured people were in possession of truths infinitely purer than the most learned sages ever discovered, when Rome had no being, and the Athenians lived upon shell-fish, gathered on the Hellenic shore. So completely did superstition extinguish every spark of divine knowledge, that had not the Jews been separated from the rest of mankind, the precious truths of natural religion had been forever lost. To preserve these sacred principles they were selected, and not for any intrinsic merit of their own. As proofs of their direct communication with God, they mention their deliverance from Egypt, the numerous miracles wrought among

* See Ganganelli's Letters.

them, and the excellence of their law, and confident of their strength, they challenge investigation.

These proofs are most genuine, and authentic, but for the law its internal evidence is sufficient. Read with attention the opinions of ancient sages, examine the principles of Zoroaster, the conjectures of Socrates, the ambiguous sentiments of Plato, lost in the vastness of his own conceptions, and Aristotle preferring the intellectual to the moral virtues, and extract from all these a system of morals like that of the Decalogue. Reflect with attention upon this inestimable summary of moral wisdom. Tell me what is superfluous, or what is wanting; and shew me in all Heathen antiquity a monument of wisdom with which it can be compared. Here you have concentrated in a single point of view the whole law of nature; and is this no proof of its being revealed? In whose possession was it found? Not among a people exalted by knowledge or eminent for wisdom, but among a people inured to slavery, and debased by oppression, and whose masters were totally unqualified to teach them truths so comprehensive and sublime.

After the promulgation of the law various revelations were still granted consisting chiefly of threatnings, and encouragements. For obedience the Jews were promised prosperity, but if disobedient, they were to become a proverb, an astonishment and a bye-word among the nations, whithersoever the Lord should lead them. This latter

prophecy has been most remarkably fulfilled on this singular nation, and is even now fulfilling. Their deliverer Cyrus is named by one of their prophets, an hundred years before he was born, and the destruction of Babylon is foretold in the height of her glory, and while she cruelly triumphed over prostrate Jerusalem. The coming of Christ is mentioned seven Centuries before he appeared, and his birth, death, and sufferings are all described as minutely as if they had already happened.

These arguments for the truth of divine revelation drawn from prophecy are most convincing ; by it God appeals to himself, as the great dispenser of all moral events. When predictions, therefore, long made are verified in the event, the argument is final, and of equal force to all men, and to all ages.

By the language of the prophets we discover that the Jewish system was only a shadow of what was to follow, a preparation for a much more perfect, and general dispensation. It was limited in its nature, and not formed for the reception of the whole human race, it was intended for the root of a tree whose branches should cover the earth. It was indeed a strong light, and its moral precepts were given to be obeyed forever, but it was not sufficient to produce worshippers in spirit and in truth. This grand distinction was reserved for the Christian religion, to which every thing esteemed holy before its publication belongs, and much never before known.

If the Jews, although the keepers of a law written by wisdom itself, were unable to reach those pure and sublime virtues which sprang from the mission of Christ, how much less were other nations qualified to offer up a sanctified worship? Among them the law of nature was obliterated, or disregarded, it possessed no authority or sanction. The mass of the people had little more knowledge of divine things, than the beasts that perish. The learned were little better, so that, considering the state of the world, instead of thinking a revelation unnecessary, we may see that to grant it was highly becoming the goodness and mercy of God. No person believing in a first cause, can deny the possibility of a revelation, if it please the Supreme Being. Now what could make a revelation necessary? Surely man not being able to fulfill the end for which he was created, was a sufficient cause, and that their moral debasement prevented this history abundantly proves. The people knew nothing of God or of the worship that was agreeable to his nature. They were sunk in the grossest superstition and idolatry, and prone to the most abominable crimes. What they called religion instead of purifying them, made them much more wicked by giving a sanction to transgression. The perfections of God, and his moral government were hid from them under a cloud of darkness, which they were unable to penetrate. They had no clear notions of the immortality of the soul, or a state of future retribu-

tion. I speak not of the vulgar only, whose corruption was horrible, but of their learned Philosophers, and oracles of wisdom. In such a situation it was surely more charitable to send a revelation than to give existence, more worthy of the goodness of God, and as easy to believe in it as in our creation.

The wise of antiquity knew their wants and confessed them. Socrates despaired of making men better, unless a teacher should descend from heaven. Alas ! he was ignorant of divine things, he had no sanction by which to enforce the practice of those duties which he so gloriously discharged. His pupil Plato, beholding the disorder of this present state, thinks nothing is done right but by the particular interposition of God. Modern philosophers are not so ingenuous ; they steal their sublime notions of sound morals, and divinity, from those very scriptures which they revile. Let me however confess with Christian candour, that such are the aberrations of human reason, that I think it probable some lovers of truth may not be convinced of the truth of the Christian religion, but their number is very small. They are commonly moderate in their pretensions, and treat that religion with respect, which they are not so happy as to believe. Such men deserve our pity, and our prayers, against them I do not speak. The greater number prejudge the subject without examination ; they pretend that all the truths of the

gospel were known before its promulgation, or that men could have easily discovered them.

But if religion has not brought them to light, how came we to be so much more knowing than the ancients? The writings of Plato, of Aristotle, and Cicero, are chiefly worthy of consultation upon this subject. They make some mention of the immortality of the soul, but how confused? They reject the superstitions of the people, but they are incapable of forming a rational worship. Their notions of virtue are ambiguous, and frequently false; Aristotle believed not the first principle of all religion natural and revealed—It is true they sometimes declaim nobly on particular virtues, but by what obligation do they urge their practice? And what enables us to detect the errors of men so wise? Certainly, the light of revelation. By minutely comparing the manners of the ancients with the dictates of enlightened reason, I might have easily shown the necessity of a revelation still more strongly. But as the lives of men are no proper test of the truth or falshood of principles, of their ignorance or knowledge of what is right, I forbear.

The Jews, with infinitely better opportunities than the Gentiles, became equally corrupted about the time our Saviour appeared. The sublime principles of the law were covered with innumerable traditions. Ceremony was added to ceremony, till all was shadow and no substance. If the state of the world was so deplorable, and if it be admitted on all hands that God could have no other end

in view in creating the world, but the diffusion of happiness, it may be allowed that this end had failed, for mankind were ignorant of the things most essential to their happiness. How the world fell into this lamentable situation we are not now enquiring, but the fact being so, we might ask our opponents whether it was more consistent with the nature of God to restore his creation to its first intention, or to let it remain as it was. If this question be allowed to be just, as I think it should, few will support the negative. We assert then that the remedy was administered at the very time, that these evils appeared at their height.

When the world was in the dismal situation we have been describing, there was born in Judea a poor man named Jesus, supposed to be the son of a Carpenter, who, assisted by twelve companions without learning, without education, without the countenance of the powerful, or the approbation of the wise, taught a system of Theology the most sublime, and of morals the most perfect, and which was disseminated with a most astonishing rapidity, through all the regions of the East, in direct opposition to the power, the interests, the pleasures, the ambition, the prejudices, and the Philosophy of the world, in spite of princes and priests, the force of superstition, and the fury of blind zeal :—A religion which admits no false virtue, however universally admired, and omits no true one, though despised by all the world.

A religion which pays no respect to the prejudices of men, throws out no vain allurements to gain proselytes, and admits no criminal indulgence ; but fills us with love and gratitude to God, excites our ardent imitation of the Divine perfections, makes us sensible of our natural weakness, and dependence, opens our hearts towards all mankind, fills us with sympathy and benevolence towards them, raises our thoughts above the frivolous joys of this life, and presents us with the most glorious prospects beyond the grave. In every other religion, the good of the present life was the first object ; here it is but the second—They took cognizance of external acts only ; it penetrates to the heart, it demands internal purity, and benevolent dispositions. It is a mirror made by the finger of God reflecting in his true character every person who looks into it. But to be more particular, let us notice a few of those virtues it recommends, and doctrines it teaches, which were never before known. Humility, the root of all the virtues, though despised by the world, is here warmly recommended. It destroys presumption and vanity, pride and envying, ambition and rivalry, and substitutes in their place, meekness, resignation, patience under injuries, moderate wishes and expectations. To revenge injuries, had always been considered to a certain extent, meritorious. It was a mark of spirit ; to omit doing it was disgraceful, and while ancient

moralists allowed and praised it under certain restrictions, it is condemned; by Christianity with more than ordinary solemnity, for to forgive others is made the express condition of our own forgiveness. A third precept is charity, or universal benevolence. This is a constellation of all the virtues, the test of the Christian's obedience, his noblest mark of distinction, a virtue so rational and sublime, and eminently useful, that the general practice of it would banish misery from the earth.

Moreover this religion inculcates several duties unknown to other religions. One of which is repentance, or a hatred of evil, with a firm resolution of being wicked no longer—a care to make every possible recompence for former transgressions, and to change our nature and disposition to a conformity with the Gospel. Love not the world is another duty enjoined, the reasonableness of which is easily discovered, for worldly things are vain and insufficient for happiness; not that we should adopt a misanthropic seclusion from society, but such a disposition of mind as prevents the world from engrossing the first place in our thoughts and affections. This duty is therefore consistent with industry, and innocent pursuits. The doctrines of this religion are equally new with its precepts; the resurrection of the dead, the immortality of the soul, the last judgment, and the triumph of the righteous.

The character of the illustrious founder of this religion is no less wonderful than the religion itself;

Indeed his excellence has never been disputed. How infinitely beyond that of any other teacher ! The mildness, the dignity, the spotless sanctity of his manners, so utterly inconsistent with every idea of enthusiasm or imposture : The sublimity of his doctrines, the consummate wisdom, and perfect purity of his moral precepts. What ardent love without the smallest tincture of superstition does he express towards God ! His devotion is always rational, his obedience cheerful and resigned. His example gives the most full and perfect illustration of his precepts. His whole employment is to do good : He is gentle mild and condescending. He goes about healing diseases, correcting errors, relieving infirmities, removing prejudices, promoting piety, justice, charity, and peace. In return for all this goodness, he is treated with contempt, and neglect. He feels the insults of his enemies, but he never allows resentment to harbour in his breast, all is patience and resignation, he returns good for evil, kindness for insult ; hated and reproached, he pities and blesses all his enemies, praying for those that thirsted for his blood. Even at his last moments, when suffering the most excruciating torments upon the cross, heightened by the savage reproach of the surrounding barbarians, he feels only compassion for them, he cries to his heavenly Father to have mercy upon them.

Jesus made his sufferings and death a part of his original plan, and essential to its success—He foretold and declared their necessity ; neither he nor his

followers derived any temporal advantage, on the contrary, they experienced the most cruel treatment. They sought not, like all other religions, to unite human policy with divine—to blend their religious with their civil power; they despised, honours, riches and pleasures. They courted poverty, ignominy and death. What then could support them, if not a consciousness of the truth? They knew that in this world they should have tribulation, be hated of all nations, and even put to death; nor had they reason to expect any blessings in the world to come, if they were propagating a lie by the false pretences of divine assistance. Moralists universally conclude that it is impossible for men to act without the appearance of some good to be procured by the action, for a love of life, and a desire of self preservation, are implanted in our nature; consequently, we avoid misery and torments; but Jesus, and his disciples could not thus abandon all the blessings and expectations of this, and of another world, and willingly subject themselves to all the misery and torments possible to be endured in propagating opinions from which they could expect no profit or advantage, unless they were bereft of common sense, had renounced the natural instincts of mankind, and were in love with ruin and destruction.

We Christians are often unjustly accused of credulity, but here we retort the charge, and declare, that those who reject our holy religion, supported as it is by the testimony of Jesus and his followers

must believe things the most incredible, and repugnant to human nature. They must believe that persons of the most blameless lives, and virtuous conversation, should, against the clearest dictates of their conscience, stand up in defence of a villainous imposture. That men, whose discourses and actions evidently tended to the promotion of true holiness, should in their hearts defy the Supreme Being, and detest all goodness—that men who taught doctrines the most sublime, and who were eminent for their wisdom, as appears by their precepts and writings, should be infinitely more zealous in maintaining and dispersing a lie, than men have ever been in confirming the truth. Our opponents must farther believe, that a few feeble men, without any visible assistance, changed the face of the world; that their weakness overcame the greatest strength; that their simplicity baffled the sharpest wit, the subtlest policy, and the deepest learning; that a rustic eloquence equally void of ornament, of erudition, or of strength—forced men, contrary to the truth, though supported by the most brilliant eloquence, to believe a story unpleasant and disgraceful; and that all this was done by men united by fraud, without interest, virtue or truth. Lastly, they must believe that after the death of Jesus, his disciples without and visible advantage or future hopes, supported his doctrine, patiently endured all that is distasteful to human nature, and sacrificed their fortunes, their reputation, and every thing that was dear to them,

to the ghost of a false prophet, and condemned malefactor. If the enemies of the gospel can digest all this, why doth philosophy inform us that self preservation, and the love of life, are laws of our nature, and that it is not possible for any man deliberately to choose to be miserable, or refuse to be happy, or not to desire to be so. These philosophical principles must be given up, or they must believe.*

The history of the christian religion is its strongest proof. It shews it to be the perfection of natural religion, as natural religion is the perfection of reason. Little are they acquainted with it who imagine that it contracts our views, while philosophy extends them. The very contrary is the truth, it gives a boundless range to all the faculties of the soul, while Philosophy limits them extremely. To the mere Philosopher, the world is every thing ; to the Christian nothing ; the former regards as his happiness, his end ; the latter, an atom, a shadow which passeth away. Religion is a golden chain, the first link of which is the Supreme Being, and which reacheth to eternity. Without its illuminating ray this world is a riddle, an inexplicable chaos, which bewilders us the more, the deeper we enquire.

The very object of this religion is new, it is not confined to the present life, it points to a future state of existence, as the goal to which we should direct our steps. This is the crown for which we are to contend—the cement that unites all our

* See Whitby.

actions closely together, prevents any thing from being foreign or indifferent ; takes cognizance of the smallest as well as the greatest actions of our lives ; and comprehends every thought, word and action. How glorious the object set before us—Take away a future state, and our lives are broken and unconnected, variable and uncertain. This explains and completes them. They no longer appear insulated occurrences, a few brilliant transactions, by which we particularize certain days and years, while all our other actions are consigned to oblivion. All mankind are moving forward, willing, and unwilling ; some groping their way in the dark, others measuring their steps in the twilight ; but the sincere Christian walks with a firm pace in the light of the Sun. How sublime to know, and by this religion only is it known, that man shall never die, that more than 800 millions of mortals are daily pressing forward to the tribunal of Christ, the wicked with tottering steps, through the mist of vice ; the heathen by the faint glimmerings of the law of nature ; while the Christian already sees his judge, and patiently waits his turn to be called.

Already have we challenged any system of morals among the ancients equal to the Decalogue ; how much more may this challenge be repeated when speaking of Christ's sermon on the mount, and his comprehensive, and sublime, yet concise prayer to his Father. But what part of the Gospel contains not superior excellences, more origin-

ality, and greater simplicity, than the books of the sages of former times. Let me request you to peruse with attention those inestimable books that contain our religion : In them you will find no appearance of artifice or of party spirit ; no attempts to exaggerate on the one hand, or depreciate on the other ; no objections anticipated. The writers honestly record their own mistakes, as well as the other particulars, of their story. But a single perusal will shew their excellence much better than any thing I can say in their favor.

Be not satisfied with this faint and imperfect sketch of this rational and sublime religion, which addresses itself to all orders of men, and makes the peasant better acquainted with the nature of the Supreme Being, and the relation we bear towards him than the most renowned worthies of ancient time ; a religion frequently neglected by the proud, because preached to the poor, and hated by men who would have been its most passionate admirers, had it been wrapped up in a system, and solicited the attention of the learned alone. What is one of its greatest perfections they dislike ; but it is no respecter of persons, it enlightens the low as well as the high ; breaks down the barrier between the philosopher and the peasant, and tells them both what they ought to do. It tells us to love, to worship, and obey God, and to be inspired with the noble emulation of imitating his divine perfections, submitting ourselves with patience,

cheerfullness, and resignation, to the vicissitudes of the present life. With the love of God it desires us join the love of man, that universal charity, which is the foundation of all the comforts of social life, the bond of connexion between earth, and heaven. This angelic disposition softens our passions, appeases our resentments, extends our beneficence to the miseries of mankind—it tells us we are all brethren, all children of the same father, and urges us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, be a Father to the Fatherless, a husband to the widow, the orphan's stay, and the stranger's shield; that it is our glory to be clothed with gentleness, humility, brotherly kindness, moderation, and equity. It tells us to keep ourselves unspotted from the world, excites our warmest gratitude to God for his unspeakable kindness; exalts us to the consideration of everlasting justice, and moral excellence, to an heavenly connection with the spiritual world. Is not this a religion worthy of our Saviour to promulgate, and of rational beings to embrace? Beings fitted by their nature to attain a perfection at present inconceivable—who are called on here to prepare for happiness in another state exceeding their limited conceptions, always increasing through the immensity of ages; to them indeed having a beginning, but which shall never have an end.

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